



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

July 19, 2005

# News Release

## **TWO MEN INDICTED FOR CROSS-BORDER FREON SMUGGLING AND MONEY LAUNDERING**

*Illegal proceeds allegedly went to Middle-East bank accounts*

SAN DIEGO – Two San Diego area men were indicted last week and charged with conspiracy to sell R-12 Freon and laundering the proceeds of at least \$135,000.

Ahed Alghazouli, 33, and Amar Alghazouli, 37, were taken into custody by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents July 13 concluding a four-year investigation that linked their business operations through United Auto Supply to a criminal conspiracy involving thousands of dollars from the illegal sales of R-12 Freon, smuggled into the United States from Mexico through California ports-of-entry. An air conditioner refrigerant used in automobiles made prior to 1994, R-12 Freon production was banned in 1996 after tests revealed it to be harmful to the environment.

Court documents allege that both men purchased the Freon cylinders in cash from smugglers they arranged to meet in various San Diego parking lots. They then sold the prohibited substance to automotive repair shops throughout San Diego and Los Angeles for \$500 per 30-pound cylinder. The brothers are also suspected of laundering their illegal proceeds through financial transactions, including hundreds of thousands of dollars placed into foreign bank accounts. Agents tracked a number of these transactions to Syria where the men maintain family ties.

“Criminal smuggling organizations search for the most lucrative schemes to enhance their financial gain, said San Diego ICE special agent-in-charge Michael Unzueta, “ICE is committed to using our law enforcement authorities to dismantle the methods criminals use to earn, move and store illicit funds – particularly in a case like this -- where the money was deposited into Middle Eastern bank accounts.”

Both defendants are scheduled to appear before U.S. Magistrate Judge Curtis on July 19, 2005, at 2 p.m.

Agents from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigations and Department of Transportation assisted in this investigation.

# ICE #